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ABSTRACT

This study examined middle and high school students' attitudes toward and perceptions of student teachers who worked in their college preparatory school. The students completed one survey with a particular preservice teacher in mind, and then they completed a second survey that was more general and reflected all student teachers they had experienced. Results indicated that 61.9 percent of students considered preservice teachers competent, and 72.3 percent considered them qualified to teach in their content area. About half of the students were comfortable, while about one-quarter were uncomfortable, with having a student teacher in class. About half were comfortable asking preservice teachers for help. Students thought that younger preservice teachers related better to students than did older ones, though their methods of determining age were impressionable. They believed older student teachers demanded more of them. The term "student teacher" had a negative connotation to respondents as though they were less qualified. First year students were the most apprehensive about preservice teachers, while juniors were the most receptive. The surveys are appended. (SM)

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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS

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As teacher education programs are modified, universities and schools develop cooperative partnerships that encourage innovative and creative approaches to teaching. A church related Middle/High School entered into a such collaborative professional development school relationship with a large urban university in 1993.

The private school's administration realized because the students were older, there was a potential for valuable feedback concerning the qualifications and competency of preservice teachers. Before any preservice teachers were assigned to the school, the sophomores were consulted as to how they felt about the program. At the time of this study these students were seniors and would have had the possibility of working with preservice teachers for three years and be in a position to evaluate them. A few students voiced concerns about the quality of teaching of preservice teachers, but they were interested and expressed their willingness to cooperate. This research project was born from these early concerns regarding the value of students' perceptions.

The school was a college preparatory school, located in a metropolitan area. Of the school's graduates, 98 percent continue their education beyond high school. In the 1995-96 school year, the school's total enrollment was 326 students; 124 students were enrolled in the Middle School, grades 7 and 8; and 202 students in the High School, grades 9 through 12. The male to female ratio of the school was 50/50. The ethnic composition of the school was 57 percent minority, 54 percent African American, 1 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Asian. All but the most affluent socioeconomic groups were represented in the student population.

SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

While there were no specific studies to date on high school students' perceptions of preservice teachers competence, there were several studies which served as directional guides. Research on gender bias and the use of affinity seeking strategies have proved helpful in providing the rationale and direction for the present study of high school school students' perceptions of preservice teacher competence.

In research conducted by Kenneth Van Oostendorp the relationship between high school students' perceptions of gender bias and a well disciplined classroom was analyzed. The students were to choose two teachers with good discipline, who were identified by gender only, and rate them from best (5) to worst (1) on the eight items related to classroom management. Results showed that 56 percent of the females and 61.5 percent of the males chose one male and one female teacher; 36 percent of the females chose two female teachers as opposed to 15.4 percent

of the males; 21.2 percent of the males chose two male teachers as opposed to 7 percent of the females.

The results stated that women teachers were more likely to be chosen as effective disciplinarians by female students and men teachers were more likely chosen by male students. Female teachers were rated higher than male teachers on the following four items: 1) The teacher encouraged the students to learn; 2) The students were aware of the classroom rules; 3) The teacher enforced classroom and school rules fairly and consistently; and 4) The students listened during the lecture and discussion. Male teachers were rated higher than female teachers on one item: The teacher handles disruptions without getting frustrated.

In her study, Susan Denham measured the effects of gender conflict and age bias that high school junior and senior male students have toward young female teachers. It examined the differences between adolescent males and females in accepting young female teachers in a role of authority and leadership, and their feelings toward teachers of different ages and sex in categories ranging from classroom organization to how the students viewed their relationship with each teacher.

The sample included the classes of five teachers: two young females (first through fifth year teachers ranging in age from 22 to 32), two older females and one older male. There were 66 students surveyed. Results showed that high school males and females differed in their perception of the young female teacher in the following areas: teacher disciplinary practices, teacher competence and teacher concern for the needs of the students. In all areas female students rated female teachers considerably higher than male students.

Another way to measure students' perception of competence was to evaluate the use of affinity seeking strategies used by the teacher. A study conducted by Ann Bainbridge Frymier of the relationship between perceived teacher affinity-seeking and teacher credibility was examined. "Affinity, " as first introduced by J.C. McCroskey and L. R.Wheeless in 1976 is "a positive attitude toward another person." This includes positive perceptions of credibility, attraction, and similarity.

Frymier's study consisted of undergraduate students in a multi-section communication course, who were asked to evaluate the instructor of their class that met immediately prior to the course in which they completed the survey instrument. The respondents were asked to assess their chosen teacher's affinity-seeking behavior using the 25 affinity-seeking strategies adapted by

McCroskey and McCroskey for the instructional setting.

Some of the strategies mentioned by Frymier facilitating affinity seeking are trustworthiness, sensitivity, enjoyment, optimism, and self-inclusion, as well as, self-confirmation. Test results indicated that the more affinity-seeking strategies teachers were perceived as using, the more credibility they appeared to have. The logical relationship between affinity-seeking and credibility indicated that appropriate, skillful use of affinity-seeking strategies leads to increased perceptions of credibility. Test correlations also indicate that teachers who use student-oriented affinity-seeking strategies were more likely to have students with higher levels of motivation, as well as, to be perceived as more credible.

Asking high school students to assess the effectiveness of their teachers and student teachers was an area where some studies already exist. Studies by Winston Hagborg and Linda Stroh were examples. Their research served as a means of showing that consulting high school students was not uncommon in educational research.

A survey of the literature indicated that more research needs to be conducted concerning the perceived competence of preservice teachers especially in the high school setting. This research attempted to examine the factors associated with preservice teacher competence through the eyes of high school students.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers of this study wanted to determine student perceptions of qualifications and competency levels of the specific preservice teachers in comparison with their regular teachers. The university used the term "student teachers" for preservice teachers of nine weeks or less, and "interns" for preservice teachers fulfilling a one year placement. There were few "interns" in the university program. This study examined if the term "student teacher" effects students' perceptions. The preservice teachers were master's degree level students, and the researchers sought to determine how high school students related to them. All teachers wanted to achieve perfect understanding between themselves and their students, but since this was not always attainable, the authors decided that two thirds of the students should be able to comprehend material presented in class by preservice teachers.

Two surveys were developed using the Likert scale of 1 to 5 (strongly agree to strongly disagree) with 36 stem questions. "No opinion" responses were not included in any of the percentages used in the data. The first, a specific survey, was directed toward specific preservice

teachers. It was administered to: one honors and one regular World History class of sophomores, two regular junior U.S. History classes, two regular junior English classes, and six Spanish classes, grade levels, nine to twelve, in Spanish I through Spanish IV. Students in classes having preservice teachers fall semester completed the survey December 5, 1995. Each student received a code number referring to a specific preservice teacher and class. A number of students participated in more than one survey because they were in classes taught by all three preservice teachers. Students completed the survey in each class with a particular preservice teacher in mind. Many questioned whether their responses would be viewed by their preservice teacher, and were assured that the responses would not be read by them.

The second survey was more general reflecting all preservice teachers students had experienced. It was conducted in all English classes the week of January 22-26, 1996. This survey was anonymous and no coding was used for identification. Researchers were attempting to determine students' general perceptions of preservice teachers.

Prior to fall 1995 semester, students surveyed experienced at least one preservice teacher. Of the 184 students surveyed, only one had no experience with a preservice teacher, sixty eight students (37%) had more than three, 37 students (20.1%) had two preservice teachers, and 24 students (13%) had one preservice teacher.

RESULTS

The results of the survey revealed that 61.9 percent of students polled were of the opinion that preservice teachers were competent; 72.3 percent thought they were qualified to teach in their content area; 48.2 percent were comfortable while 24.5 percent were uncomfortable having a preservice teacher in class; 52.7 percent were comfortable asking for extra help, and over half 58.1 percent indicated preservice teachers were available for extra help. Although the overall survey results exhibited positive responses toward preservice teachers, the term "student teacher" as used by the university and the school did not. The responses to question 16, "The term 'student teacher' implies that the person is less qualified than the regular teacher," produced a positive response of 51.1 percent versus 40.8 percent. The researchers found this to be a reversal of their other responses about preservice teacher qualifications and competency. This raised many questions. Was it the term per se, or the way it was used as the cooperating teacher introduced the preservice teacher to the students? When high school students hear the word "student" do they think of that person as someone on their own level rather than an authority figure? Does the term

"student teacher" denote inexperience or immaturity to a teenager? If the term "student teacher" were replaced by intern or preservice teacher, would students have responded differently?

Students (59.8%) found preservice teachers to be effective communicators, however only 48.3 percent thought preservice teachers' answers to student questions were easily understood while 40.8 percent did not. If preservice teachers generally communicate effectively, why was there such a high percentage of students who did not understand class material? This percentage fell below what was acceptable in a classroom.

Seventy-five percent of those surveyed said preservice teachers involved all students in class; and 61.4 percent indicated they encouraged students to learn. Preservice teachers were thought to grade fairly (68.5%) and return papers and tests quickly (69.1%). Forty-four percent of the students thought preservice teachers taught the same way every day, while 56.5 percent thought the classes were interesting.

Students (52.2%) responded that preservice teachers handled discipline effectively in class; 54.3 percent had the same authority as regular teachers; (56.5%) enforced school rules; however 48.4 percent believed preservice teachers were manipulated by students. If high school students find preservice teachers easy to manipulate, was this related to the preservice teachers' inexperience, or their desire to be a friend to the students? This resulted in a lack of authority and possible manipulation. From observations and conversations with preservice teachers, the researchers discovered they want to be the students' friend.

Eighteen and one half percent of students indicated preservice teachers did not enjoy teaching their classes, 19.5 percent felt they were neither friendly nor easy to talk with, and 28.5 percent were uncomfortable having preservice teachers teach their classes. The statistics indicate that 38.6 percent of students did not see preservice teachers as authority figures. The researchers found these numbers significant since only a small number of dissatisfied and unhappy students can cause class disruption.

SPECIFIC PRESERVICE TEACHERS

Overall preservice teachers A (history), B (English), and C (Spanish) were considered qualified and competent, but teacher C was generally ranked 10 percentage points lower than A and B. Responses to question 28, "I could understand the material in class when the student teacher explained it," indicated preservice teacher C had only 22 percent of students understood the class material, while preservice teacher B had 91.4 percent positive responses, and preservice teacher A

had 58.2 percent. Although preservice teacher A had a negative response of only 29.9 percent to question 28, classes were observed in which he failed to communicate on a level understandable to high school sophomores. Yet only one third of his students found this to be the case. Could their responses have been affected by their liking history? Frymier (1992) discussed the relationship between favorite subject and favorite teacher. Preservice teacher C's classes were composed of 54.5 percent freshmen, 34.1 percent sophomores, and 19.5 percent juniors. Preservice teacher A's classes were composed of 50.7 percent sophomores and 46.3 percent juniors. Teacher B's classes were 2.9 percent sophomores and 97.1 percent juniors. Our data showed that freshmen were the most apprehensive about preservice teachers while juniors were the most receptive. The composition of these classes could have affected the responses toward preservice teachers C and B.

Responses to question 11, "Student teachers are 'real teachers'", indicated that 35.4 percent of students thought preservice teacher C was a real teacher while B was 54.3 percent and A was 52.2 percent. Responses to question 12, "Student teachers look like teachers," indicated preservice teacher C, 53.7 percent, B, 62.9 percent, and A, 59.7 percent. Preservice teachers B and C were females, relatively the same stature, and in their early to mid-twenties. Preservice teacher A was male, the same age category, average size, and his results ranged between B and C in almost all categories. Preservice teacher B was an "intern" and was always spoken of as an "intern." Preservice teachers A and C were "student teachers" and were referred to as such. Students responded that all preservice teachers "looked like teachers," yet A and B were considered "real" teachers, while C was not. Looking at these results the question was raised: Was it the preservice teachers' demeanor, voice quality, mannerisms, or any of the qualities included in one's persona that effected the students' perceptions?

The responses to all questions in the general survey were similar to those in the specific survey with the exception of question number 5 that referred to a favorite subject. Thirty percent favored physical education, followed by math and science with 27.1 percent, English 17.1 percent, and 12.9 percent for both foreign language and history. More freshmen and seniors took the general survey than the specific survey. By the senior year most of the basic requirements for graduation were satisfied, therefore many seniors were enrolled in advanced level courses, e.g. Physics, Calculus, Advanced Placement English, Honors Modern U.S. History. This made it difficult to speculate on the impact of favorite subjects.

CONCLUSION

The results of the research showed that more research is needed concerning perceived competence of preservice teachers, especially in the high school setting. The results indicated that students thought that "younger" preservice teachers related better to students than "older" preservice teachers. However, the students' methods of determining age were impressionable, as determined by their response to: "I can tell the age of a teacher or student teacher" by:

A. The way they dress: 59 percent

B. By the way they wear their hair: 32 percent

C. The way they speak: 59 percent

D. The way they control the class: 48 percent

E. How much they know about their subject matter: 27 percent

When considering responses to question 26, which ask if older preservice teachers demand more of students, overwhelmingly students responded positively. In considering that preservice teachers from fall semester 1995 were twenty five or under, and the criteria students used to determine age, how could they really determine who was "older" or "younger?"

Data showed the term "student teacher" had a negative connotation to high school students. They perceived the person as less qualified simply because of the use of the term, even though students indicated that preservice teachers were qualified to teach in content areas, looked like teachers, graded fairly, and made the class interesting. Was the term "student teacher" the problem, or was it the role the "student teacher" was performing? Is it possible that anyone in an apprentice role is perceived as less competent than the regular person, even though that may not be the case. In comparing teachers with doctors, do we as patients want to see the intern or the regular physician? It appeared that some psychology came into play with high school students and their preservice teachers.

In reference to "Affinity-Seeking in the Classroom: Which Strategies Are Associated with Liking of the Teacher?" by Ann Bainbridge Frymier (1992) who was measuring the relationship between favorite subjects and favorite teachers, similar results were found with preservice teacher A where 29.9 percent of students indicated history was a favorite subject. Preservice teacher B's students indicated only 14.3 percent preferred English as a favorite subject, yet she received the highest positive rating as a preservice teacher. Students in preservice teacher C's classes chose foreign language and physical education as favorite subjects with 22.2 percent each, yet she

received the lowest rating of all preservice teachers. The survey sought to determine effectiveness in the classroom, not popularity, and the assumption was that students answered the questions accordingly. The researchers were not seeking to prove or disprove Frymier's theory, however it did not correlate with the subjects taught by preservice teachers B and C.

SUGGESTIONS

1. More in school orientation for preservice teachers to allow a feeling of confidence and comfort that will be displayed when they are initially introduced to the students.
   --Use of "intern" or some other appropriate term in place of "student teacher."
   --Preservice teacher handbook composed by the school administration containing school policy, rules, and regulations.
   --Team teaching prior to preservice teacher assuming control of the class.
2. Development of preservice teacher's leadership skills.
   --Present self as an authority figure.
   --Develop a "teaching voice".
   --Improve body language, including eye contact, movement around classroom.
   --Professional dress.
   --The development of a teacher's persona must be initiated at the university level prior to any exposure to a classroom. It must then be continued and reinforced throughout the preservice assignment.
3. Observations with a specific focus from other teachers, besides the cooperating teacher, someone from the administration, and inclusion of pre and post conferences.
4. Not all teachers are suited for the role of mentor/cooperating teacher, but can serve in other capacities.
5. Improved mentor training for cooperating teachers. This training should be provided in part by the university, and then continued and reinforced within the PDS by the administration and faculty.
   --Possibly a specific university mentoring program setting up guidelines for present and future cooperating teachers.

With these suggestions preservice teachers should have a more positive and successful experience.

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GENERAL SURVEY

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT TEACHERS SURVEY

1. NUMBER OF STUDENT TEACHERS YOU HAVE HAD AT BISHOP BYRNE HIGH SCHOOL: A. 0 B. 1 C. 2 D. 3 E. 4 or more

2. GRADE: A. 9 B. 10 C. 11 D. 12

3. SEX: A. male B. female

4. GRADE POINT AVERAGE: A. 4.0-3.6 (A) B. 3.5-2.6 (B) C. 2.5-1.6 (C) D. 1.0-0.6 (D) E. Below 0.6 (F)

5. MY FAVORITE SUBJECT IS : A. Math/Science B. English C. History D. Foreign Languages E. P.E.

GENERAL STATEMENTS: Read each statement and mark whether you
A. strongly agree B. agree C. strongly disagree D. disagree E. no opinion

6. Student teachers are qualified to teach in content areas.
7. Student teacher are competent
8. Student teachers communicate effectively with students
9. Student teachers handle discipline problems in the class effectively.
10. Student teachers have the same authority as regular teachers.
11. Student teachers are "real teachers".
12. Student teachers look like teachers.
13. Student teachers have distracting mannerisms.
14. Student teachers get involved in extra-curricular activities.
15. Student teachers make our school better.
16. The term "student teacher" implies that the person is less qualified than the regular teacher.
17. Student teachers are easily manipulated by the students.
18. Student teachers encourage students to learn.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS IF YOU HAVE HAD A STUDENT TEACHER IN HIGH SCHOOL.

SPECIFIC STATEMENTS: Read each statement and mark whether you
A. strongly agree B. agree C. strongly disagree D. disagree E. no opinion

19. The student teacher graded me fairly.
20. The student teacher involved all students in my class.
21. The student teacher graded and returned my papers and tests quickly.
22. I like the subjects the student teachers taught.
23. Older student teachers relate better with students.
24. Student teachers' tests are too hard.
25. Student teachers make the class interesting.
26. Older student teachers demand more of students.
27. Student teachers enforce the school rules.
28. I could understand the material in class when the student teacher explained it.
29. Younger student teachers relate better with students.
30. Student teachers are available for extra help.
31. The student teachers seemed to enjoy teaching my classes.
32. Student teachers are friendly and easy to talk with.
33. I felt comfortable having a student teacher teach my class.
34. I felt free to ask the student teacher for extra help.
35. The student teacher answered the questions that students asked in class.
36. Older student teachers are more competent than younger ones.
37. The student teacher taught the same way everyday.
38. I enjoyed the methods used by the student teacher in my class.
39. I feel comfortable receiving directions from student teachers.
40. I can tell the age of a student teacher by the way he/she dresses.
41. Younger student teachers demand more of students.

Thank you for your assistance in this survey.

(SPECIFIC SURVEY) STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT TEACHERS SURVEY

1. NUMBER OF STUDENT TEACHERS YOU HAVE HAD AT BISHOP BYRNE HIGH SCHOOL: A. 0 B. 1 C. 2 D. 3 E. 4 or more

2. GRADE: A. 9 B. 10 C. 11 D. 12

3. SEX: A. male B. female

4. OVERALL AVERAGE IN THIS CLASS: A. A B. B C. C D. D E. F

5. MY FAVORITE SUBJECT IS : A. Math/Science B. English C. History D. Foreign Languages E. P.E.

GENERAL STATEMENTS: Read each statement and mark whether you
A. strongly agree B. agree C. strongly disagree D. disagree E. no opinion

6. Student teachers are qualified to teach in content areas.
7. Student teacher are competent
8. Student teachers communicate effectively with students
9. Student teachers handle discipline problems in the class effectively.
10. Student teachers have the same authority as regular teachers.
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